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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000196

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SUBJECT: SURVEY OF CUBANS ON SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS
CONFIRMS TIMES ARE TOUGH

Classified By: CHIEF OF MISSION JONATHAN FARRAR FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

11. (SBU) FROM MARCH 2-18, THE REFUGEE UNIT AT USINT CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF 285 APPLICANTS FOR REFUGEE STATUS ABOUT A WIDE RANGE OF SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN CUBA. THE SURVEY WAS NOT SCIENTIFIC IN THAT THE RESPONDENTS WERE LIMITED TO CUBANS ACTIVELY SEEKING TO LEAVE THE ISLAND. NONETHELESS, IN THE SENSE THAT ANY CUBAN CAN APPLY FOR REFUGEE STATUS, MOST OF THE APPLICANTS IN OUR SURVEY CAME FROM OUTSIDE HAVANA, WE HAD A MIXTURE OF MALES AND FEMALES OF VARIOUS AGES, AND PEOPLE FROM ALL EDUCATIONAL LEVELS AND RACES, THE SAMPLE IS FAIRLY REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL CUBANS AND GIVES SOME USEFUL INSIGHTS INTO WHAT LIFE IS LIKE FOR MANY HERE. QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND ANALYSIS FOLLOW.

12. (SBU) OF THE 285 RESPONDENTS, 90 WERE WOMEN, 166 WERE MEN, AND 29 DID NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION ABOUT GENDER. ALL WERE 21 OR OLDER, AND THE AVERAGE AGE OF RESPONDENTS WAS 44. 257 RESPONDENTS IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS EITHER WHITE OR HISPANIC; 27 AS BLACK; AND 1 DID NOT ANSWER. 87 OF THE RESPONDENTS ARE RESIDENTS OF HAVANA; 197 ARE RESIDENTS OUTSIDE HAVANA, AND 1 DID NOT ANSWER.

13. (C) ON LEVELS OF EDUCATION, 31 REPORTED FINISHING BETWEEN 1ST-6TH GRADE; 91 BETWEEN 7TH-9TH GRADE; 109 BETWEEN 10-12TH GRADE; 23 SAID THEY HAVE A TECHNICAL DEGREE; AND 30 CLAIMED TO HAVE ATTENDED UNIVERSITY. COMMENT: 43% OF OUR RESPONDENTS HAD A 9TH GRADE EDUCATION OR LOWER, WHICH RESTRICTS THEIR EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS, AS MANY JOBS REQUIRE A 12TH GRADE EDUCATION. THE EDUCATION OF MANY OF OUR APPLICANTS IS POOR, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE A 12TH GRADE DIPLOMA. THIS IS EVIDENT IN THEIR HANDWRITING, THEIR ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS IN ORAL INTERVIEWS, AND THEIR ABILITY TO FILL OUT SIMPLE FORMS AND FOLLOW SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS. SCHOOLS TEACH USING THE ROTE METHOD, WHERE MEMORIZATION IS KEY. QUALITY TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHERS ARE LACKING, AND COMPUTERS ARE RARE. CUBAN YOUTH ARE FALLING BEHIND IN EDUCATION, DESPITE ROSY CLAIMS BY THE GOC ABOUT THE REVOLUTION'S TRIUMPH IN ERADICATING ILLITERACY. END COMMENT.

14. (C) ON THE QUESTION OF OCCUPATION, 114 SAID THEY WORKED ON THEIR OWN WITHOUT A LICENSE (NOTE: PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT IS ILLEGAL WITHOUT A LICENSE), 46 DID NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION, 38 SAID THEY WERE HOUSEWIVES, 27 SAID THEY WORKED FOR THE STATE, 26 SAID THEY WERE UNEMPLOYED, 15 SAID THEY WORKED PRIVATELY WITH A LICENSE, AND 15 SAID THEY WERE PENSIONERS. COMMENT: IN A COUNTRY THAT CLAIMS EVERYONE IS ALLOWED TO WORK, AND THE STATE IS THE MAIN EMPLOYER, ONLY 10 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS CLAIMED TO HAVE STATE JOBS. ALMOST HALF OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED THE QUESTION SAID THEY WORKED ON THEIR OWN WITHOUT A LICENSE, WHICH RUNS THE RISK OF FINES, HOUSE SEARCHES, AND EVEN ARREST FOR "DANGEROUSNESS." OUR REFUGEE APPLICANTS FREQUENTLY TELL US THAT THEY REFUSE MENIAL STATE JOBS OFFERED TO THEM SUCH AS JANITOR OR CUTTING GRASS BECAUSE THE PAY IS TOO LOW TO SURVIVE. EVEN DOCTORS ARE WILLING TO WORK AS MAIDS OR GARDENERS FOR WESTERNERS BECAUSE THE PAY IS HIGHER. MANY OF OUR APPLICANTS HAVE REQUESTED LICENSES TO REPAIR SHOES, OR MAKE CANDY, OR DO ANY OF A NUMBER OF LIKE JOBS, BUT THEIR REQUESTS ARE DENIED BY THE GOVERNMENT, SO THEY DO THESE ACTIVITIES ANYWAY ILLEGALLY. WE INSTRUCTED APPLICANTS TO CIRCLE ONLY ONE OCCUPATION, BUT WE REALIZED AFTER THE SURVEY THAT MANY CUBANS WORK WITH THE STATE AND WORK ON THE SIDE AS WELL, SO MANY OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY WORK FOR THE STATE OR ON THE SIDE MAY BE DOING BOTH. END COMMENT.

15. (C) WE ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS IN THIS SURVEY TO GET

A SENSE OF WHETHER CUBANS WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE "REFORMS" INTRODUCED BY RAUL CASTRO LAST YEAR, FOR INSTANCE, A NEW LAW ALLOWING CUBANS TO PRIVATELY OWN A CELL PHONE. 22 OF 285 RESPONDENTS SAID THEY HAD A CELL PHONE; 263 SAID THEY DID NOT. COMMENT: ALMOST EIGHT PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED CURRENTLY HAVE CELL PHONES. ONE RESPONDENT NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD HAD A PRIVATE CELL PHONE BEFORE THE REFORMS WERE ANNOUNCED. ASKED HOW THAT WAS POSSIBLE, AS IT WAS NOT LEGAL FOR MOST CUBANS TO OWN PRIVATE CELL PHONES AT THAT TIME, HE RESPONDED THAT THE PHONE WAS UNDER THE NAME OF A FOREIGN FRIEND. THAT IS OFTEN HOW THINGS ARE DONE IN CUBA TO GET AROUND LAWS AND REGULATIONS. SOME OTHER CUBANS MAY HAVE OWNED CELL PHONES IN THE PAST PROVIDED BY THEIR EMPLOYER, THE STATE. SO WE MUST CONCLUDE THAT AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAID YES TO OWNING A CELL PHONE ARE NOT NEW OWNERS BUT RATHER HAVE BEEN USING ONE CONNECTED TO THEIR STATE JOB OR HAVE ONLY RECENTLY BECOME LEGALLY REGISTERED FOR PRIVATE PHONES THEY WERE ALREADY USING UNDER SOMEONE ELSE'S NAME. THIS TENDS ALSO TO CONFIRM WHAT WE UNDERSTOOD ANECDOTALLY, THAT THE REFORMS ANNOUNCED BY RAUL CASTRO SIMPLY MADE LEGAL VARIOUS PRACTICES THAT WERE ALREADY OCCURRING ILLEGALLY. THE VAST MAJORITY OF CUBANS, HOWEVER, CANNOT AFFORD TO PAY MONTHLY CELL PHONE BILLS AND THUS HAVE NOT BOTHERED TO TRY TO ACQUIRE A CELL PHONE. IN FACT, MANY CUBANS STILL DO NOT HAVE HOME TELEPHONES. END COMMENT.

¶16. (C) SIMILARLY, WE ASKED WHETHER RESPONDENTS HAD STAYED IN HOTELS IN CUBA, WHICH UNTIL LAST YEAR WERE RESERVED FOR FOREIGNERS. 13 OF 285 SAID YES; 265 SAID NO; 7 DID NOT RESPOND. COMMENT: A FEW OF THE 13 RESPONDENTS WHO SAID YES INDICATED THEY HAD STAYED IN A HOTEL FOLLOWING THEIR MARRIAGE. THE GOC OFFERS A SPECIAL DISCOUNT FOR HONEYMOONERS. THESE RESPONSES INDICATE THAT IT IS A RARE OCCASION INDEED WHEN A CUBAN STAYS AT A HOTEL, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO DO SO. END COMMENT.

¶17. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD OBTAINED A COMPUTER SINCE REFORMS LAST YEAR ALLOWED SUCH PURCHASES, 270 RESPONDENTS SAID NO; EIGHT SAID YES; AND SEVEN DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: LIKE CELL PHONES AND HOTELS, COMPUTERS ARE A LUXURY THAT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF CUBANS CANNOT AFFORD. SEVERAL OF THE FEW WHO SAID YES INDICATED THAT THE FUNDS TO BUY THE COMPUTER, OR THE COMPUTER ITSELF, CAME FROM RELATIVES IN THE U.S. SOME OF THOSE WHO OWN COMPUTERS NOW HAD THEM BEFORE THE REFORMS WERE ANNOUNCED, SO THEY ARE NOT REALLY "NEW" COMPUTER OWNERS. END COMMENT.

¶18. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF A REFORM ALLOWING CUBANS TO PUT TO USE FALLOW LAND FOR AGRICULTURE, 25 SAID YES; 252 SAID NO; AND EIGHT DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: THE LAW AS WRITTEN ALLOWS THOSE WHO ARE APPROVED TO PUT FALLOW LAND TO USE FOR TEN YEARS, THEN IT REVERTS TO THE GOVERNMENT. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THOSE WHO ARE GOING AHEAD WITH THIS ACTIVITY WILL BE ABLE TO OBTAIN THE TOOLS, SEEDS, FERTILIZER, AND TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT LABOR TO SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE CUBA'S DISMAL FOOD PRODUCTION. END COMMENT.

¶19. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF A REFORM ALLOWING CUBANS TO GET LICENSES TO USE THEIR CARS AS PRIVATE TAXIS, 268 SAID NO; NINE SAID YES, AND EIGHT DID NOT ANSWER.

¶110. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES, 239 OF 285 SAID YES; 44 SAID NO; AND TWO DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: 84 PERCENT CLAIMED TO HAVE A RELATIVE IN THE UNITED STATES, A VERY HIGH NUMBER INDEED.

¶111. (C) THOSE WHO HAVE RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES WERE ASKED HOW MUCH MONTHLY THEY RECEIVED IN REMITTANCES FROM THEM. (NOTE: THOSE WHO RECEIVE REMITTANCES THREE OR FOUR TIMES A YEAR WERE ASKED TO CALCULATE A MONTHLY AVERAGE. END NOTE.) 174 SAID THEY RECEIVED NO MONEY FROM THEIR RELATIVES; 61 SAID THEY RECEIVED BETWEEN 1-25 USD MONTHLY; 33 SAID THEY RECEIVED BETWEEN 26-50 USD MONTHLY; 12 SAID THEY RECEIVED BETWEEN 51-100 USD MONTHLY; AND TWO SAID THEY RECEIVED MORE THAN 100 USD MONTHLY. TWO OTHER PERSONS DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: INTERESTINGLY, MORE THAN HALF OF THOSE WHO HAVE RELATIVES IN THE U.S. SAID THEY RECEIVED NOTHING IN

REMITTANCES. MOST WHO DO RECEIVE REMITTANCES RECEIVE NO MORE THAN 25 USD PER MONTH. EVEN THAT SMALL AMOUNT, HOWEVER, MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING. A MONTHLY REMITTANCE OF USD 25 IS MORE THAN THE AVERAGE CUBAN MONTHLY SALARY. END COMMENT.

¶12. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY EXPECTED TO RECEIVE MORE MONEY IN THE FUTURE FROM RELATIVES IN THE U.S., GIVEN THE CHANGE IN U.S. LAW ALLOWING GREATER REMITTANCES, 41 SAID YES; 221 SAID NO; AND 23 DID NOT ANSWER.

¶13. (C) CUBA HAS TWO CURRENCIES, THE MONEDA NACIONAL PESO, IN WHICH CUBAN WORKERS ARE PAID, AND THE CONVERTIBLE PESO, WHICH FOREIGNERS OBTAIN FOR THEIR HARD CURRENCY AND WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO BUY CERTAIN ITEMS IN STORES. ONE CONVERTIBLE PESO EQUALS 24 MONEDA NACIONAL PESOS. A GROUP OF ACTIVISTS IN CUBA BEGAN A CAMPAIGN CALLED "ONE CURRENCY" TO TRY TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT TO DO AWAY WITH THE CONVERTIBLE PESO, COMPLAINING THAT CUBAN WORKERS CANNOT AFFORD ANYTHING FOR SALE IN CONVERTIBLE PESOS. OUR SURVEY ASKED WHETHER RESPONDENTS WERE IN FAVOR OF ONE OR TWO CURRENCIES. 253 OF THE RESPONDENTS SAID ONE CURRENCY; 26 DID NOT ANSWER, AND 16 SAID THEY WERE IN FAVOR OF TWO CURRENCIES.

¶14. (C) ASKED WHETHER THE ECONOMY HAS IMPROVED, STAYED THE SAME, OR WORSENER COMPARED TO LAST YEAR, 159 SAID IT HAD WORSENER; 107 SAID IT WAS THE SAME; AND 11 SAID IT HAD IMPROVED. EIGHT RESPONDENTS DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: CUBA SUFFERED SEVERAL HURRICANES LAST AUGUST-SEPTEMBER CAUSING LASTING DAMAGE TO THE ECONOMY. THE ECONOMY WAS WEAK EVEN BEFORE THE HURRICANES, SO FOR 107 TO SAY IT IS THE SAME AS LAST YEAR, AND 159 TO SAY IT IS WORSE, INDICATES THAT THE OVERWHELMING PERCENTAGE OF CUBANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FRAGILE AND FALTERING CUBAN ECONOMY. END COMMENT.

¶15. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD ENOUGH RESOURCES TO AFFORD "THE BASICS," 259 SAID NO; 23 SAID YES, AND THREE DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: AGAIN, THIS RESPONSE DEMONSTRATES THE DIFFICULT SITUATION OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF CUBAN FAMILIES TO MAKE ENDS MEET. END COMMENT.

¶16. (C) ASKED IF THEY HAD ACCESS TO CONVERTIBLE PESOS, 236 SAID NO; 47 SAID YES; AND TWO DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: 83 PERCENT CLAIMED THEY DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO CONVERTIBLE PESOS AND ALL THE THINGS CONVERTIBLE PESOS CAN BUY. THAT ONLY 47 SAID THEY HAVE ACCESS TO CONVERTIBLE PESOS, WHEN 108 CLAIMED TO RECEIVE REMITTANCES, IS A VARIANCE WE CANNOT CLARIFY WITHOUT ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS. IN A SENSE, AS POINTED OUT TO US BY ONE RESPONDENT, ALL CUBANS HAVE ACCESS TO CONVERTIBLE PESOS IN THAT THEY CAN EXCHANGE THEIR MONEDA NACIONAL FOR CONVERTIBLE PESOS, BUT THE RESPONSES IN THIS SURVEY INDICATE THAT MOST CUBANS CANNOT AFFORD TO DO SO. END COMMENT.

¶17. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD THE RESOURCES TO REPAIR THEIR HOUSES, 280 SAID NO; THREE SAID YES; AND TWO DID NOT RESPOND. COMMENT: CUBAN HOUSING HAS BEEN SLOWLY DETERIORATING FOR DECADES. AS THE STATE IS THE OWNER OF HOUSING, CUBANS EXPECT THE STATE TO PROVIDE UPKEEP. BUT THE STATE IS EITHER UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO DO SO. OVER 98 PERCENT OF OUR RESPONDENTS ARE APPARENTLY NOT ABLE TO REPAIR THEIR HOUSES THEMSELVES, AND THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT PROVIDING MUCH HELP EITHER. WE HAVE HEARD IN OUR DAILY REFUGEE INTERVIEWS THAT ON THE RARE OCCASIONS WHEN THE GOVERNMENT DOES PROVIDE SOME SORT OF HOUSING REPAIR ASSISTANCE, IT IS RESERVED FOR THOSE WITH SUFFICIENT REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL. THOSE CONSIDERED UNTRUSTWORTHY OR COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY GET NOTHING. END COMMENT.

¶18. (C) ASKED IF THEY HAD ENOUGH RESOURCES TO BUY FOOD FOR THE FAMILY, 259 SAID NO; 25 SAID YES, AND ONE DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: 91 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED COMPLAINED THEY CANNOT BUY SUFFICIENT FOOD FOR THE FAMILY. ONE RESPONDENT TOLD US "YES, I HAVE ENOUGH FOOD, BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH." THIS SEEMING CONTRADICTION APPEARS TO MEAN THAT THE FAMILY HAS ENOUGH FOOD TO SURVIVE, BUT THEIR STOMACHS ARE NOT FULL. THE LIBRETA (FOOD STAMP BOOK) PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT MEETS ONLY ABOUT HALF OF THE FOOD REQUIREMENTS OF A FAMILY EACH MONTH. OUR RESPONDENTS SEEM TO BE INDICATING THAT THEIR

MEAGER SALARIES ARE NOT ENOUGH TO PURCHASE THE FOOD SHORTFALL EACH MONTH. END SUMMARY.

¶19. (C) ASKED WHETHER THEY WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN MEDICATIONS NEEDED FOR FAMILY MEMBERS, 187 SAID NO; 96 SAID YES; AND TWO DID NOT ANSWER. COMMENT: A NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT OVER THE COUNTER DRUGS ARE OBTAINABLE, BUT THAT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ARE OFTEN EITHER UNAVAILABLE OR UNAFFORDABLE, OR BOTH. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM THAT CUBANS HAVE WORLD CLASS MEDICAL CARE, 65 PERCENT OF OUR RESPONDENTS DO NOT GET THE MEDICINE THEY NEED. END COMMENT.

¶20. (C) ASKED HOW MANY OCCUPANTS LIVE IN THEIR HOUSE, 73 REPLIED 1-3; 149 REPLIED 4-6; 43 REPLIED 7-9; AND 20 REPLIED MORE THAN 10. THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF OCCUPANTS PER HOUSE WAS 5.1 IN OUR SURVEY. MEANWHILE, THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF BEDROOMS WAS 2.4 PER HOUSEHOLD, SO THAT THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE/BEDROOM WAS 2.1 IN OUR SURVEY. COMMENT: MANY CUBANS WHOM WE INTERVIEW COMPLAIN THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE LIVING IN THEIR HOUSE, BUT THEY HAVE NO OPTION TO CHANGE HOUSING AS THE STATE TIGHTLY CONTROLS THIS ACTIVITY. END COMMENT.

¶21. (C) CONCLUSION: THE SURVEY DEMONSTRATES THAT MOST CUBANS ARE BARELY SCRAPING BY UNDER VERY DIFFICULT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND THAT THE RECENT "REFORMS" ARE HAVING LITTLE EFFECT ON EITHER THE ECONOMY OR THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF MOST CUBANS. CONTINUING ECONOMIC HARDSHIP IS A MAJOR REASON CUBANS FLEE THE ISLAND, BOTH VIA LEGAL AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION.

IN OUR DAILY REFUGEE INTERVIEWS, WE HEAR OVER AND OVER APPLICANTS SAY THAT THERE IS NO FUTURE IN CUBA, THAT THEY WANT OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY AND WORK THAT HAVE BEEN DENIED THEM HERE, AND THAT THEY WANT A BETTER LIFE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. INTERESTINGLY, A NUMBER OF OUR RESPONDENTS FROM OUTSIDE HAVANA CONFESSED IGNORANCE OF THE REFORMS ANNOUNCED LAST YEAR, INDICATING THAT FOR THEM NOTHING HAS CHANGED.

FARRAR